STORYTELLING:

THE THREAD OF HUMANITY

By Alex Bennet, 2001

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Abstract

This paper explores the unique relationship of man and his stories, looking at various aspects of storytelling and differences between written and oral stories. Myths, folktales and transformational tales are discussed before exploring story as knowledge, the value of personal storytelling, the moral purposes of stories, and the use of story in healing. Finally, we look at the use of stories in organizations before considering the future of storytelling.

Introduction

Through the ages, as long as man can remember, and possibly longer, the telling of stories has shared a unique relationship with man. In the dictionary, story is defined as a narrative account of real or imagined events. But storytellers generally agree that a story is a specific structure or narrative with a specific style, a set of characters and a sense of completeness. The three simple basics in every story are a beginning, a middle and an end. The beginning sets the routine. In the middle, something happens to upset the routine, going on until a new routine is established at the end.

Dr. Daniel Taylor says, "A story is the telling of the significant actions of characters over time." (Taylor, 1966, p. 15) He notes four aspects of story. The first is the *telling* aspect of the story that first marks its humanity, sending it out into the world as an act of faith. The second aspect is *something to tell*, something worth telling, that matters to the teller, to the listener. The third aspect is the *character*, what Taylor defines as "a bundle of values in action." (Taylor, 1966, p. 18) Character is what persists in an individual, the "habits of choice that shape who we essentially are even as what is not essential about us is in a constant process of change and, eventually, decay." (Booth, 1988, p.8) Thus character is what we are at our core, our essence, that which is remembered long after a story is forgotten. Taylor's fourth aspect is the telling of significant actions of characters *over time*, which can be thought of both in terms of the duration of the action in the story itself, or the time it takes in the telling of the story. The aspect of time relates to change (this is the middle of the story) in order to move to the ending.

Looking at storytelling through a different lens, McAdams says that readers/listeners of stories have set expectations that a story will have certain consistent features. The first is a *setting* of some sort, which is discovered early on. The second expectation is that a story will have *characters*, human or humanlike. These characters begin at some point, then there is an *initiating* event, motivating the character(s) to attempt to achieve a *certain goal*. This *attempt* leads to some sort of *consequence*, which promulgates some sort of *reaction*. As

tension builds across a story, or episodes of a story, there is the expectation of eventual resolution, a solution of the plot, what is called the *denouement*. (McAdams, 1993, p.25-26)

Mellon says the best plot is a plot that follows your pulse beat. "A plot that is based on your pulse beat – a regular flow of fours – unfolds in a regular pattern." (Mellon, 1992, p.178) The central character(s) set out on a journey, and overcome three obstacles, ending with a radiant sense of unity and well-being. This blueprint has an infinite number of variations. If you double the basic four-beat rhythm, then seven tests or obstacles, or perhaps rewards, come to your hero.

Another time-honored story sequence is built on three sets of four (twelve). The zodiac uses this power of twelve. Mellon says:

> "Uniting story imagination with the power of one, two, three, resolving in four, a story ground becomes firmly formed out of the complex numerical wisdom that courses continuously through you. Every effort you make to circulate these pulse-beat heart rhythms in your stories affirms some of the most fundamental laws of your nature which … form the foundation of all lives. Whatever your purpose for making a story, if you summon patterns that have been stored within you from the story imagination of past aeons and work with these carefully, your story will contain transformative energies." (Mellon, 1992, p.178-179)

Stories teach us how to live, how to act. Alasdair MacIntyre says we can only answer the question "*What am I to do?"* if we can find the answer to the question "*Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?"* MacIntyre asserts:

> "We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters – roles into which we have been drafted – and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed. It is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, lost children, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but must make their own way in the world and eldest sons who waste their inheritance on riotous living and go into exile to live with the swine, that children learn or mislearn both what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words. Hence there is no way to give us an understanding of our society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources. (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 216)

Isabel Allende thinks that stories are to the big audience, to readers, to society, what dreams are to individuals. Repeating plots that have been told over and over, stories clear up the fog of our minds. Allende states:

> "Dreams somehow unclog you mind and help you tune into the unconscious world from where you can draw experience and information. I think that's what stories do. There are hundreds, thousands, but we are always repeating the same stories. All the great plots have already been told innumerable times. We can only tell them again in a different way, but every time we do that, we tune into the myth. Somehow we make the society dream, and maybe that's why stories are important. … The power of storytelling is amazing. (Allende, 1997, p. 98)

Written and/or Oral?

Stories in printed form have a very different reality than those told orally. Printed stories are set in a firm context that may be explored again and again and again as the reader thinks about the work in different modes and explores the meaning of the writer. Steve Denning looks at this availability as a kind of logarithmic table, "scarcely more alive than the abstract reasoning for which we have set them aside." (Denning, 2000, p. 137) Denning feels that the force of the story is not in the story itself, but in the telling of the story, with the teller expressing understanding and eliciting understanding from the listener.

> "A focus on the story alone, to the exclusion of the interaction between the storyteller and the listener, misses the point of storytelling. It is the interaction of the storyteller with the listeners and the communal meaning that emerges from the interaction." (Denning, 2000, p. 137)

Long agrees with Denning. He thinks that stories work better and are more fun when they are shared verbally.

> "This is not to diminish the power of the written word, but storytelling was originally an oral art, and stories traditionally were passed on by word of mouth for generations. There is a qualitative difference that can easily be detected when a story is read to instead of told to someone." (Long, 1986, p. 5)

Sven Birkerts would not necessarily agree with Denning and Long cited above. In his work *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*, Birkets describes the reading of a story as a virtual journey into a different world, a different mental location, the place where the story is occurring. This imagined reality is elicited by the author, who uses linguistic tools to stimulate this world into existence. The reader enters into the role of co-creator with the author, with the conjuring up of the image taking on flavors of the reader. The more effective this transition, the more effective the story is as a story. When fully engaged, Birkerts argues that reader's minds are working in concert with the storyteller, generating a cooperative virtual world of story in which the reader can come and go at will, and feel a sense of connectedness that is often difficult to achieve in the outside world. Inside the story, readers' lives make sense, as they not only determine and inform the actions of the characters of the story, but remap

their own lives in relation to the story. The readers' participation in a story can change their perceived relationship to all other things. (Birkerts, 1994, pp. 80-82) This change has to do both with the content of the story and the process of the storytelling.

An oral story cannot be recorded accurately on paper. So much of the telling depends on other things – the background of the teller, the interpretation of emotions, the way the listener responds, the teller's and listener's thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and/or the teller's abilities. Storytelling, then, is defined as an oral art form that provides a means of preserving and transmitting ideas, images, motives, and emotions that are universal. (Cassady, 1990, p.5)

In *Oral Cultures Past and Present: Rappin' and Homer*, Edwards and Sienkewica, who studied the oral tradition from ancient Greeks through the contemporary era, present the argument that oral storytelling and literature are poles of a single continuum. But instead of presenting the oral and written as dichotomous, they look at them as two parts of the same whole. They go on to say that an understanding of the social context of the story is vital. The issue becomes "not only oral versus written but also how to preserve the vital elements of culture when a folk tale is retold – whether on paper or in performance." (Leotta, 1997, p. 41)

Oral folklore is always moving and changing, while written form captures a moment in time. When a story is put on paper, the words and way they are juxtaposed must carry the message. When a story is told verbally, there are subtle nuances of eye contact and body language that tell a tale richer than the verbal language itself. This also says that each time an oral tale is told, there are differences. Stories told out loud are living experiences that are transformed by the heart and soul and experience of the teller and listeners. This, however, is not always considered a benefit. Barbara Walker, a renowned folklorist and writer, warns that storytellers must not get carried away with technique so that their histrionics overshadow the story itself. (Leotta, 1997, p. 43)

Stories from Native American tribes form a large number of tales from the oral traditions of North America. These stories serve as a cultural foundation for their tribes. They are meant to be repeated over and over from generation to generation.

> "Now I will tell you stories of what happened long ago. There was a world before this. The things that I am going to tell about happened in that world. Some of you will remember every word that I say, some will remember a part of the words, and some will forget them all – I think this will be the way, but each man must do the best he can … You must keep these stories as long as the world lasts; tell them to your children and grandchildren generation after generation …" (Feldman, 1965, Preface)

At the root of Indian stories as Indian culture, are the concepts of "reciprocity and the right relation to the earth." (Bruchac, 1997, pp. 12-15)

Native American tales are not only memorable, but have exciting details that attract both storytellers and audiences alike. For example, Iroquois stories are filled with such wonderful creatures as stone giants, monster bears, flying heads, magical dwarfs, and vampire skeletons. But with the telling of these stories comes a responsibility to ensure an understanding of the *context* of these stories. These stories are not meant to exist in isolation from the culture of the people to whom they were addressed. They have a strong relationship with the sacred, and were intended to serve as lessons and communication tools.

Bruchac believes the storyteller of Native American Stories must also have an awareness of the place and proper use of these stories. There "appears to be a continent-wide tradition that all Native American myths and legends are to be told only at certain times and in certain ways." (Bruchac, 1997, p. 14) An example is the Anishinabe medicine woman and storyteller who begins every story with an offering of tobacco to the ancestors, and then begins each story in song.

Stories were to be told only during winter months in most North American tribes, and, in many cases, only at night. Also, to mention the names of certain characters in the stories outside of the story itself was considered bad luck. For example, some California Indian tribes say that if you mention the name of Coyote outside the story he will come visit you and cause mischief. Enforcement of these traditions is not through human means, but through the powers of nature. For example, the Iroquoi say that if you tell stories in summertime a bee will fly into your dwelling lodge and sting you. In like manner, the Abenaki believe that if you tell stories during the growing season, snakes will come into your house.

Myths

Perhaps the best-known writer on myth is Joseph Campbell. Campbell believes that throughout the inhabitated world, in all times and under every circumstance, the myths of man have flourished. They are the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind. In his words, "It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation." (Campbell, 1949, p.3) To Campbell, everything boils up from the basic, magical ring of myth. That everything includes religion, philosophy, the arts, and prime discoveries in science and technology.

A myth is a traditional or legendary story, usually concerning some superhuman being or some alleged person or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation, especially a traditional or legendary story that is concerned with deities or habitants. (Webster, 19 , p. 946) The word can also be used to denote an imaginary or fictitious thing or person; any invented story, idea or concept; or a collective belief that is accepted uncritically and used to justify a social institution.

For Campbell, myth is a philosophical text, one in which truths are revealed symbolically. It is an adventure in three phases: departure, initiation and return. The mythological hero sets forth from his common home (or a castle), and is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds to the threshold of adventure. At that threshold he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. At this point the hero either defeats or conciliates this power and goes, either dead or alive, through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces. At the end he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. While these myths continue today, Campbell points out that these same journeys are no longer undertaken in the mystical and symbolic context of cosmic law, in bright moments of the tribe's great victories, but in the silences of personal despair. Campbell sees the mythical journey of man today as understanding man, coming to terms with himself, but the hero plays a larger role in the universal cycle of growth, dissolution and redemption. Ultimately, we each move from the microcosm of the individual to the macrocosm of the universe. Myth opens us to the unalterable truths of human existence – its joys and sorrows, its pains and pleasures – which are the same for all people. (Campbell, …. P. 391)

Stories come in different forms, generally divided into comedy, romance, tragedy and irony. These forms provide a scema to help understand the narrative tone of stories. Simply put, comedy and romance have an optimistic narrative tone while tragedy and irony suggest a pessimistic tone. In constructing personal myths, we draw on a mixture of narrative forms. No single life is pure tragedy or pure comedy. Nor is there a simple correspondence between narrative tone and life history. "Personal myths involve an imaginative reconstruction of the past in light of an envisioned future. They are subjective creations – illusions, in a sense, whether they be positive or negative." (McAdams, 1993, p. 53)

McDaniels asserts that we do not discover ourselves in myth, but we *make ourselves* through myth. He believes that human lives are much too complex for a typological approach, and too socially inflected to support an argument that truth resides solely within. Quite dramatically, he makes the case that:

> "Truth is constructed in the midst of our loving and hating; our tasting, smelling, and feeling; our daily appointments and weekend lovemaking; in the conversations we have with those to whom we are closest; and with the stranger we meet on the bus. Stories from antiquity provide some raw materials for personal mythmaking, but not necessarily more than the television sitcoms we watch in prime time. Our sources are wildly varied, and our possibilities, vast." (McAdams, 1993, p.13)

Folk Tales

Folk tales are true stories of the folk that migrate from culture to culture, often having mythical aspects, and often picking up elements of different cultures as they progress around the world. For example, Cinderella and Rumpelstiltskin have similar elements but subtle differences when told today in cultures around

the world. Briar Rabbit stories came from Ghana, but the moon under which they are told is perceived as that which each of us sees from our own location. Puss in Boots comes from the Crusaders, but has changed considerably from its original Persian tale.

The patterns of cause and effect, and good and evil are indigenous to all cultures and run through folk tales, recasting generation after generation's experience and exploring areas fundamental to every human. Because they are repeated over and over again through generations, they are honed to concise models of narrative, building blocks of the imagination, a promise to fulfill our dreams.

> "For what folktales give us, is a language of wish-fulfillment. In these stories we can make what we wish to happen finally happen. In the mind. In the imagination. We can see and feel what we may have to strive all our lives to bring into actual being. But in the folktale it is complete and we live and feel it in the unique terms of our own images." (Martin, 1999, p. 22)

These are the tales of Cinderella, the reward of good and the punishment of evil. These are the stories of the soul, repainting the traditional tales of our ancestors. Martin believes folktales are the nourishment of the soul. "Without them we are never quite ourselves, never who we might have been. And they must be recast in words. Only then can they come alive in our own interior images, only then can they live, become us, enter our bloodstream, hearts and bones and empower our lives."

Transformational Tales

Transformational tales are the single largest thematic topic in storytelling. Both myths and many folk tales fall into the thematic area of transformational tales. Children's author Jane Yolen says this is because they (1) speak to the condition of duality that we all feel; (2) hold out the promise of a fresh start, a new life; and (3) bring us closer to nature. Yolen further suggests that transformation tales are endemic in storytelling today because of early peoples belief in transformation and a cumulative effect in storytelling history, "Early cultures, preliterative cultures, whether Native American or African, all the totemic religions, really believed that a person could become an animal." These beliefs have survived in transformational stories. (Godown, 1996, pp. 22-23)

The use of animals to present truths is used in many forms of transformational stories. For example, the beast fable has a long history. The well-known Aesop fables from the Greco-Roman world are of this genre. The use of beast stories became a major literary form in the Middle Ages with the rise of interest in allegory, a literary form where there is an intended second-order meaning to the events occurring in the story. Animals of the forest and barnyard played the parts of men and women in these tales. Beasts of all sorts figured

prominently on crests, shields and banners of notable people. For instance, the English lion appeared on the shield of England's kings. The white boar formed part of Richard III's personal coat of arms.

This use of animals as symbols was also employed in the religious art of the period, particularly Christian art in Western Europe. For example, the dove indicated the presence of the Holy Spirit, the whale symbolized the devil (tempting sailors and luring them down to hell) and the leopard represented the sin of pride. Today much of this symbolism continues, though meanings have evolved. The dove has grown to become a symbol for peace around the world.

In literature today, the tradition of use of animal in allegory is prevalent in such works as George Orwell's Animal Farm, taking political allegory to the barnyard, and Rudyard Kipling's Jungle Books, who used wolves as symbols of civilization and the wild dogs of India and the great lame tiger, Shere Khan, as symbols of savagery.

Sacred stories are transformational stories. According to Yolen, sacred stories are stories that tell us "who we are and how we relate to the world and our gods." (Simpkinson, 1997, p. 24) They work very much like dreams, long after the details and meaning have slipped away, there is a new awareness. Writer Joe Bruchac believes that sacred stories carry an "energy – a truth, a lesson, an insight, an emotion – that can enter our being and connect us to a distant past and to powerful primal forces." (Simpkinson, 1997, p. 25)

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Hasidism transformed Eastern European Judaism and brought with it a revival of Jewish storytelling. Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, stated that: "Telling stories praising the *tzaddikim* [saints] is equivalent to the most profound mystic study and meditation." (Buxbaum, 1997, p. 52) *Rebbes*, Hasidic leaders, praised storytelling as a divine commandment and spiritual practice, often telling stories and also instructing their followers, the *Hasidim*, to do likewise. Teaching storytelling as a holy activity equal to the study of Torah or prayer, these rebbes actually developed a theology of storytelling that answers such questions as what is the place of storytelling among spiritual practices? Why do stories captivate and charm us? How should they be listened to and told? What effects do they have? Storytelling became a natural and integral part of a person's religious life. Ordinary people, everyone in the community, began understanding the value of stories, and began telling stories.

Hasidic stories are in the oral tradition, coming alive in the telling with the expectation that listeners will visualize themselves in the action. Stories are the most real thing in the world. They have inspirational power and teach practical lessons. In the Hasidic tradition all stories have a "therefore", or a lesson, and the teller of the story may stretch out the story by discussing its meaning, and listeners are encouraged to share their insights.

Since the Hasidics believe nothing happens except by Divine Providence, there is a reason for every story, and a reason why each person is listening to that story. Stories are attributed with the ability to bring about miracles, and even "telling stories of former miracles can cause similar miracles to occur." (Buxbaum, 1997, p. 54)

What are called *pourquoi* stories, part of the American Indian oral tradition, are transformational stories. *Pourquoi* stories, named after the French word meaning *Why*, are transformational stories that tell the how and why. These stories, passed on from generation to generation in the oral tradition, center around the creation, naming and characterization of almost everything in nature. They are instructive, teaching lessons in a gentle, non-threatening way. Animals and unspecified settings are often used to provide a comfortable distance for the listener.

These tales provide moral instruction on how we should and should not behave. For example, an Algonquin story tells about a very hard-working man who had a lazy wife who never cleaned their home. One day, Wakonda (one of the Great Spirits) is going to visit. The man begs his wife to clean. When she didn't, the man was told to take some dirt and throw it at his wife. These specks of dirt became the first mosquitoes. *Pourquoi* stories are also used as a means of conveying survival information.

The transformational aspect of *pourquoi* stories often involves supernatural or magical elements. Specific characteristics of the *pourquoi* story include:

- Settings that are unclear as far as time and place.
- Characters defined by only those elements that are essential to the story.
- A dilemma that is common to the listener.

Candace Miller believes pourquoi stories have survived because of their usefulness.

> "Stories make lessons easier to remember through simple truths and justice, without pointing a finger at anyone. They also satisfy a need to know – to make sense of the unknown. And, perhaps most compelling of all, they are our connection with people who lived thousands of years ago, who walked the same ground and marveled at the same wonders of nature that we do." (Miller, 1996, p. 19)

The *springboard story*, a new term coined by Steve Denning in his recent book *The Springboard,* is a type of transformational story that enables the listener to take a personal leap in understanding how an organization or community or complex system may change. Denning purports that the intent of this type of

story (told in oral tradition) is not to transfer information, but to serve as a catalyst for creating understanding within the listener.

> "It can enable listeners to visualize from a story in one context that is involved in a large-scale transformation in an analogous context. It can enable them to grasp the ideas as a whole not only very simply and quickly, but also in a non-threatening way. In effect, it invites them to see analogies from their own backgrounds, their own contexts, their own fields of expertise." (Denning, 2000, p.xix)

The stories that Denning felt were successful in this transformation had specific characteristics. They were told from the perspective of a single protagonist who was known to the audience and actually in the predictament being told; there was an element of strangeness or incongruity to the listeners which could capture their attention and imagination; the story had a degree of plausibility and a premonition of what the future might be like; and there was a happy ending. "[Happy endings] seemed to make it easy for the listeners to make the imaginative leap from the explicit story that I was telling, to the implicit story that I was trying to elicit in their minds." (Denning, 2000, p.xx)

Story as Knowledge

Knowledge is experiences and stories, and "intelligence is the apt use of experience and the creation and telling of stories." (Shank, 1998, p. 16) Shank states that our knowledge of the world is more or less equivalent to our experiences. We understand experiences in terms of those experiences already in our memory that we understand, so that new ideas are dependent on old ideas. Context helps us relate incoming information to those experiences already in our memory, and stories provide that context.

These stories are not static, they are invariably the result of authorial aspect, changing every time they are remembered and retold.

> [J]ust as the novelist is selective with respect to character development, plot, etc., so the person who seeks the connective threads in the history of his life … has singled out and accentuated the moments which he experiences as significant; others he has allowed to sink into forgetfulness. The result of this process is narrative unity as something akin to *fictionalized history* …[The] narrative unity which results from this process is not discovered; it is the result of selective attention, emphasis, dim remembrance, and possibly even forgetting. The person makes choices about the importance of persons and events, decides of their meanings, though there may only be a minimal awareness of the resulting order as a partially created one. These choices and decisions – like those of a novelist – are not arbitrary; they are guided by the desire for the "good story." The finished product is the "fictionalized" history of a life,

> neither a lie nor "the truth," but instead a work of imagination, evaluation and memory. (Long, 1986, pp. 75-92)

Human memories themselves are story based. While all experiences are not stories, stories are remembered because they come with many indices, multiple ways that the story is connected to memory. "The more indices, the greater the number of comparisons with prior experiences and hence the greater the learning." (Shank, 1998, p. 11) In order for memory to be effective, it must have not only the memories themselves (events, feelings, etc.), but memory traces (or labels) that attach to previously stored memories. These indices can be decisions, conclusions, places, attitudes, questions, etc.

Denning agrees that we live in a soup of narratives. "Why narratives permeate our lives and understanding is that resorting to narratives is the way in which we have learned to cope with our world of enormously complex phenomena." (Denning, 20000, p. 112) Denning sees the narrative language of stories as the most appropriate instrument to communicate the nature and shape and behavior of complex adaptive phenomena. This is because stories capture the "essence of living things, which are quintessentially complex phenomena, with multiple variables, unpredictable phase changes, and all of the characteristics that the mathematics of complexity has only recently begun to describe." (Denning, 2000, p. 113)

Shank says, "wisdom is often ascribed to those who can tell just the right story at the right moment and who often have a large number of stories to tell." (Shank, 1998, p. 14) This, of course, is the appearance of wisdom, or intelligence, and is not necessarily an indicator of what the teller truly understands about what is being said. An example is a computer that has thousands of stories and the ability to carefully select those directly related to specific patterns, but, of course, has no understanding of the stories it is telling.

Shank measures intelligence in terms of the number of stories an individual has to tell, and in terms of the size of an individual's indexing and retrieval schema that provide a mechanism for determining what is relevant to current experiences and the ability to search and find what is relevant. Shank outlines seven dimensions of intelligence: data finding, data manipulation, comprehension, explanation, planning, communication and integration.

The first dimension of intelligence is data finding. Data finding goes beyond the first memory traces of reminding, conversations that recall already-processed stories, and on to the ability to *get reminded*. While labeling it not a conscious process, thinking about an experience is, and mulling over an experience builds additional indices for future recall. A special kind of reminding (what we would call a good memory) occurs when the conscious is able to pull up past experiences not obviously connected to current experiences. This good memory is based on attentive labeling during processing and good search techniques. Attentive labeling is very dependent on the number of interests an individual has; the more interests someone has; you can't remember as well what

you don't find interesting because you have fewer indices to bring it into recall. Search, in turn, is dependent on the complexity of the labeling system in place.

> "In sum, then, we can say that it is a normal part of intelligence to be able to find, without looking for it, a story that will help you know what to do in a new situation. It is an exceptional aspect of intelligence to be able to find stories that are superifically not so obviously connected to the current situation. If you have labeled a story in a complex fashion prior to storage, it will be available in a large variety of ways in the future. Higher intelligence depends upon complex perception and labeling." (Shank, 1998, p. 224)

The second dimension of intelligence is data manipulation. Once again, partial matching is part of everyday intelligence. An example is when you see someone who has just had a haircut. You may recognize something is different, but you still recognize the person. We do something similar in matching stories, when we pull stories stored in memory that have similar elements to current events. This process of recall can extend itself to where very partial matches can add value to a new situation. An additional extension occurs when an old story is adapted to create a new story. This is the high end of intelligence, where old stories are used as resources for creativity to cope with new situations.

The third dimension of intelligence is comprehension. Once again, there are levels of comprehension. We automatically connect new stories to old stories, but the mind can go beyond this connecting to figure out meaning in a new story even though there is no old story it is related to, finding coherence where they is no obvious coherence.

The fourth dimension of intelligence is explanation. As a matter of course we can explain our failures, but beyond that is recovering from these failures and using them to prevent future failures. This entails finding the predictive rules within a failure and having the ability to apply these to future scenarios. Since no story has one possible rule, this discovery process is both repetitive and innovative. Shank contends that

> "the more intelligent you are the more you will fail. Ultimately the value of failure and the explanation of failure is to come up with new rules that predict how events will turn out. … Thus, the task for an intelligent system is to be looking for failures that it can use its stories to explain in order to create new rules to be tried and considered again." (Shank, 19 , p. 232)

The fifth dimension of intelligence is planning. On a day-to-day basis we execute plans that are copies from others. At a second order level, we adapt these plans to current situations. At a higher level of intelligence we create and execute plans of our own. These plans do not need to be new to society, but new to the individual who is creating and implementing them.

The sixth dimension of intelligence is communication. For humans, communication is very case dependent, intended to make a point the teller wishes to communicate. The extension of this ability is in the creation of new stories and the elaboration of old ones. Shank sees the ability to go beyond simple, direct descriptions of what has happened as a higher level of intelligence. "[Intelligent people] have learned how to *generalize*, *crystallize*, and *elaborate* so that they tell stories that express insights not obvious in the original story." (Shank, 19 , pl.234) While Shank sees this crystallization-generalization aspect of intelligence as a learned skill, it is very dependent upon having stories to tell in the first place.

The seventh dimension of intelligence is integration. At the first level, we all understand stories that we have been told. This element deals with not only what is remembered but what is forgotten, since integration is involved in the selection of what will be rememberd and what will be forgotten. The higher level of this intelligence includes curiosity, where an individual goes beyond integrating the current with the remembered to seeking new understanding. The significance of integration to perceived intelligence, however, is very environmentally driven. For instance, a child who embraces everything new about computers and consistently works to integrate the current and remembered will be considered more intelligent in today's world than a child with similar capabilities who is focusing on motorcycles.

In summary, intelligence is measured by the stories we know.

> "So the issue with respect to stories is this: We know them, find them, reconsider them, manipulate them, use them to understand the world and to operate in the world, adapt them to new purposes, tell them in new ways, and we invent them. We live in a world of stories. Our ability to utilize these stories in novel ways is a hallmark of what we consider to be intelligence." (Shank, 19 , p. 241)

The Value of Personal Storytelling to the Individual

There are innumerable benefits that accrue from personal storytelling. Maguire presents a set of what he calls the blessings of personal storytelling (Maguire, 1998, p. 13-30)

- Personal storytelling invests our lives with more meaning.
- Personal storytelling connects us more vitally with others.
- Personal storytelling develops our creativity.
- Personal storytelling strengthens our humor.
- Personal storytelling increases our courage and confidence.
- Personal storytelling renders our lives more memorable.

Storytelling invests our lives with more meaning. The greatest human desire, even beyond that of happiness, is to have our lives mean something. "This

desire for meaning is the originating impulse of story. We tell stories because we hope to find or create significant connections between things." (Taylor, 1966, p. 1) The act of storytelling is an act of organizing, making sense out of, our memories thoughts and emotions. Because stories have a beginning, middle and end, a wholeness is created from disparate parts. They teach us that there is a place where we fit, suggesting our lives can have a plot. "Stories turn mere chronology, one thing after another, into the purposeful action of plot, and thereby into meaning." (Taylor, 1966, p. 2)

McAdams says that we each seek to provide our scattered and often confusing experiences with a sense of coherence by arranging the episodes of our lives into stories. His thoughts invoke the power of myth described earlier.

> "This is not the stuff of delusion or self-deception. We are not telling ourselves lies. Rather, through our personal myths, each of us discovers what is true and what is meaningful in life. In order to live well, with unity and purpose, we compose a heroic narrative of the self that illustrates essential truths about ourselves." (McAdams, 1993, p. 11)

Stories also validate experiences. Negative experiences transformed into stories help us to learn from those experiences. Because we are the heros of our personal stories, the focal point, there is a building of self-respect in sharing them. Simple experiences can become charged with wondrous moments and meaningful themes, almost miraculous.

Storytelling connects us more vitally with others. Stories and storytelling do not occur in a vacuum. We are characters in the stories of others, and others are characters in our stories, leading to shared commitments and shared understanding. The words "*let me tell you a story"* are an invitation to human relationship. To tell a personal story to others, we must relate to them and they to us. We are literally engaging others in our personal experience, sharing our thoughts, feelings and emotions. Through this sharing, a bond, a relationship is built with others, often reciprocated by the listener and resulting in the exchange of stories. In addition, every time we repeat a story we are building deeper relationship with the individuals within our story. Taylor sees this an important element of "finding myself."

> 'Finding myself' is less a matter of uncovering some supposedly pristine and genuine self within, or uncorrupted by outside influences, than it is discovering my role in various stories in which I am only one of many characters. Being one character out of many in a larger story does not diminish me; it enlarges me and my possible significance. I am not an isolated individual desperately searching for an illusory self and plaintively insisting on my needs and rights; rather I am a character in a story with other characters, making choices together that give our lives meaning. (Taylor, 1996, p. 69)

O'Halloran sees this power of storytelling to connect as one of storytelling's greatest assets, moving beyond the teller and the listener. "The power to connect is one of storytelling's most remarkable gifts. Storytelling can inspire us to see our country and us as mosaics of strength, strong and large enough to hold everybody's story." (O'Halloran, 2000, p. 26)

Storytelling develops our creativity. "People create because they can't help it." (Cassady, 1990, p.9) There is joy in creation. In telling stories, we reflect again and again on our experiences, remembering them in the new light of what we have learned since last we remembered them. We transform these stories into new meanings and new realities in the context of the communication and in an attempt to influence the listener. This does not make the stories less authentic or effective, for the story told is inevitably based on the story teller's perception and interpretation of experience. Storyteller Donald Davis sums this up by saying "Think of storytelling as painting a picture instead of taking a photograph." (Maguire, 1998, p. 24)

Personal storytelling strengthens our humor. Humor is the ability to delight, laugh and smile at the wonder of life. Telling personal stories builds the capability of putting things into perspective, as we weave into words our own interactions with life. The word *humor* is from the Latin word *umor*, which means fluid. Maguire states:

> By calling attention to the many different ways that people related to each other – be they foolish or wise, amazing or commonplace, deliberate or accidental, hilarious or horrible – personal storytelling helps restore our equanimity, our sensitivity to the right proportion of things, our "humor," so that we can be more humane. And it tempers our feelings of self-importance, superiority, self-righteousness, and smugness, so that we can be more humanely humble." (Maguire, 1998, p. 26)

Personal storytelling increases our courage and confidence. The very telling of personal stories values the stories told. If they are important enough to be remembered and shared, they denote value in our lives. As we become more and more conscious about our stories, and our roles as characters in those stories, we have more clarity about who we are, why we are here, and how we should act in the world. (Taylor, 1966, p. 2)

In addition, since personal stories rely on our remembering and our effective expression of remembering, they remind us of our own capabilities and creativity. This builds self-confidence and courage, which extrapolates to every aspect of life.

> Above all, storytelling gives us love and courage for life: in the process of making up a wonderful story, new spirit is born for facing the great adventures of our lives and for giving wise encouragement to others, of any age, along their own pathways. Every storyteller collects and arranges

> vital inner pictures; behind these live universal ordering principles." (Mellon, 1992, p. 123)

Personal storytelling renders our lives more memorable. Quite literally, through drawing on our memory to tell stories, we are enhancing old memories and building new memories. This exercise of our memory carries over into all aspects of our lives. From a symbolic viewpoint, the gestures and images used in the telling ennoble the story, making it more important, more memorable. The repeated story becomes an individual cultural ritual, bearing witness to who we are.

In summary, personal stories are who we are as humans, defining both the way we understand ourselves and the way we relate to others and the world around us. Steve Denning says: "Each time we enter the word-woven magic of a story, our lives are enlarged, as we given ourselves to another mode of knowing." (Denning, 2000, p.xxii) We shall now explore the moral purposes of stories.

The Moral Purposes of Stories

In looking at narrative approaches to ethics, Nelson identifies five categories, each interacting with stories in a different way. The first category is as a receiver, as a *listener* or *reader*. Listening to and reading stories gives the receiver the opportunity to pay attention to the complexities and nuances of the story, sharpening the moral sensibilities.

> "One does this by allowing the author of the work to direct one's attention to the rich and subtle particulars of the narrative – the moral, intellectual, emotional and social nuances. When the author has set these out with skill and imagination, overlooking no meaningful detail, the reader can see what is morally at issue in the narrative: she becomes 'finely aware and richly responsible'. … Political reasoning, too can benefit from the emotions evoked by the literary imagination." (Nelson, 1997, p. x)

Riffaterre looks at narrative truth as a linguistic phenomenon since it is experienced through enactment by reading.

> It is a performative event in which participation on the reader's part can only serve to hammer the text's plausibility into his experience. Because of this, the verbal nature of mimesis, since the transformation of the given into synonymous representations corresponds to the conventions of a society or of a class, these also serve as guidelines for the positive or negative interpretations the reader is led to adopt. (Riffaterre, 1990, pp. xiv-xv)

This approach leads to the understanding that while fiction emphasizes the fact of the fictionality of a story it is simultaneously stating that the story is true. It is

what Riffaterre calls an artifact since it is a verbal representation of reality rather than reality itself.

A second approach is the *telling* of stories, where the teller makes moral sense of something by choosing the particulars and experience through the light of moral ideas. This is what Margaret Urban Walker calls *strong moral self-definition*, where a morally developed person turns to personal history to help make a decision in the present. The decisions made set precedents for the future, so are geared not only toward who we are, but who we want to become. The power of stories is clear in the work Nelson did looking at stories that dominant members of a community tell about oppressed others to keep them in their place. Counter stories emerge to combat this oppression. "I have been exploring the conditions under which counter-stories – stories of resistance and insubordination told or enacted by the oppressed or on their behalf – exert pressure against these stories of domination, allowing the oppressed to decline the identities their oppressors have constructed for them, and so to gain access to more of the good things their community has to offer." (Nelson, 1997, p. xi)

A third approach is to *compare*. This was a medieval Christian practice, where moral guidance was sought through comparing cases of conscience. A fourth approach is *literary analysis*, where literary criticism is applied to either explicit narratives or to a social practice. This is a hermeneutical approach grounded in some form of literary criticism.

A fifth thing to do with stories is to *invoke* them, using them to make or illustrate a moral point. This is often the purpose of our myths and fables, parables and anecdotes. We hear about this approach often in legal cases, where legal precedents are invoked to provide guidance.

It is clear that Nelson's concept of five things to do with stories look at them through a moral lens are closely aligned with the values of story discussed earlier in the paper.

The Use of Story in Healing

Dr. Daniel Taylor clearly states that we are our stories, the product of the all the stories we have heard and lived and many that we have never even heard. Stories have shaped how we see ourselves, how we see the world, and our place in it. The first great storytellers in our lives are at home and school, in the popular cultures, and, perhaps, at church.

> "Knowing and embracing healthy stories are crucial to living rightly and well. If your present life story is broken or diseased, it can be made well. Or, if necessary, it can be replaced by a story that has a plot worth living. (Taylor, 1966, p. 1)

But stories, and lives, can be broken. Whole societies, as well as individuals, struggle to live by stories that cannot sustain them. Taylor calls the stories that can no longer provide meaning and a sense of purpose failed stories. "If you cannot convincingly articulate a plot for your life, you are living a broken story. If our society as a whole is directionless, it is because we have abandoned many of the defining stories of our past without finding adequate replacements." (Taylor, 1966, p. 3)

> In therapy, the story provides a bridge between the healer and the patient. "… vicarious experience [that serves] as a means of sympathetically participating in the lives of others … But cultivating experience through imagination, through metaphor, through creative reading, a bridge can be established between the world of the patient (the other) and the world of the nurse or the physician or ethicist (the self). (Radey, 1992, p. 40)

Storytelling has been actively used in therapy for nearly as long as man has existed. There are specific terms of art that have emerged which define the use of story in healing, terms such as psychotherapy, the use of story to depathologize life, and bibliotherapy, the use of literature to help individuals with emotional problems. A major goal in these therapies is to develop a coherent life story. Some psychological problems, and a great deal of emotional suffering, stem from our inability to make sense of our lives through stories.

> "Human life is, ideally, a connected and coherent story, with all the details in explanatory place, and with everything (or as close to everything as is practically possible) accounted for, in its proper causal or other sequence … illness amounts at least in part to suffering from an incoherent story or an inadequate narrative account of oneself." (Taylor, 1966, p. 4)

Thom Bristow, a 30-year veteran psychotherapist, feels that storytelling is a powerful alternative for emotional problems. "As you tell a story, you can make choices about what your hero does and what will happen as a result. You have control of your story. If you transfer this to real life, you'll find that you do have choices and that by making these choices you can take control. Telling and living a story aren't all that different." (Bristow, 1997, p. 18) When working with patients, Bristow invites the participant to become the hero of a story, which puts the participant in control, bringing a sense of security and building self esteem. Bristow goes on to say that it is important to find the right story, the story that makes you laugh or cry and teaches you something.

Angela Klingler, a retired registered nurse, has spent much of her professional and private life telling stories to children. She believes that stories work in a number of ways to evoke positive emotions and attitudes, positively influencing the healing process. They can provide distance from stress and anxiety, improve a patient's state of mind by evoking joy and humor, and, through imagery, speak to the conscious and unconscious mind. (Klinger, 1997, p. 22

In *The Healing Art of Storytelling*, Richard Stone writes that hospital settings and other healthcare environments should:

> "… make room for institutional models of healing that incorporate storytelling and other art forms … even traditionalists are opening themselves to the possibility that the quickest route to healing the body is through the psyche and the soul. Like shamans in tribal societies, storytellers may soon be walking the halls of hallowed medical institutions dispensing their remedies one tale at a time." (Stone, 1996, p. 14)

Long uses the term metaphor and story interchangeably, thinking of metaphor as an altered framework for novel experiences. This direct form of treatment involves protagonists, character development, dramatic devices, a storyline following one of several specific protocols, and some form of a conclusion. (Long, 1989, p.1-4) The treatment strategy is designed to frame the presenting problems against a backdrop of the interpersonal/developmental demands surrounding the patient. It works through a series of identified goals dealing with affect, attitude, behavior, family structure, self-image, identity development, and discipline/enjoyment. Three stories of used as focal points to addressing these goals.

Stories are often a part of the healing rituals in Native American nations. For example, in the Navajo tribe figures from stories are created in colored sand on the earth, and the individual who is to be cured is placed on top of the sand painting to become part of the story. This ritual may go on for days at a time.

The healing discussed above is built on community, a community of two or more, the teller, and the listener(s). At an even larger level, story can embrace the entire human community. "Whether small or large, community is healing because it both requires something of us and give us something back. In story, both teller and listener have responsibilities to the other, responsibility being the fair price we pay for the many benefits of sharing a story with others." (Taylor, 1966, p. 114-115) Taylor goes on to say that although the boundary between the teller and the listener is far more fluid than we usually realize, it is only the story that affects how we actually live that is significant.

The larger healing power of stories also derives in part from partaking in the character of ritual, *voluntarily*. In a sacred context, we are tied to the transcendent, everlasting things larger than ourselves. (Taylor, 1966, p. 121) There is a strong link between ritual, story and health. Leslie Marmom Silko, a multi-cultural mixture of Laguna Pueblo, Mexican and white and raised on a reservation near Albuquerque, writes about the effects on Native Americans of broken stories.

I will tell you something about stories …
They aren't just entertainment.
Don't be fooled.
They are all we have, you see,

all we have to fight off
illness and death.

You don't have anything
if you don't have the stories.

Their evil is mighty
but it can't stand up to our stories.
So they try to destroy the stories
let the stories be confused or forgotten.
They would like that
They would be happy
Because we would be defenseless then.

He rubbed his belly.
I keep them here . . .
Here, put your hand on it
See, it is moving.
There is life here
for the people.

And in the belly of this story
the rituals and the ceremony
are still growing.

(Silko, 1997, Preface) When stories fall apart, whether for an individual or for a culture, both are left defenseless, without, quite literally, knowing who we are or what we should do.

The Use of Storytelling in Organizations

The Institute for Knowledge Management defines organizational story as "a detailed narrative of past management actions, employee interactions, or other intra-organizational events that are communicated informally with the organization." (Swap, 2000, p.12) These narratives include a plot, major characters and an outcome.

There are a variety of story forms that exist naturally throughout organizations, including scenarios and anecdotes. Scenarios are the articulation of possible future states, constructed within the imaginative limits of the author. While scenarios provide an awareness of alternatives -- of value in and of itself -- they are often used as planning tools for possible future situations. The plan becomes a vehicle to respond to recognized objectives in each scenario.

An anecdote is a brief sequence captured in the field or arising from a brainstorming session. To reinforce positive behavior, sensitive managers can seek out and disseminate (true) anecdotes that embody the value desired in the

organization. The capture and distribution of anecdotes across organizations carries high value.

> "We have discovered that once a critical number of anecdotes are captured from a community, the value set or rules underlying the behavior of that community can be extracted … Understanding these values allows us to start to utilize informal as well as formal aspects of the organization." (Snowden, 1999)

Healthy organizations are filled with anecdotes. "If there are none, this tells the manager a lot about the socialization and internalization going on in the organization!" (Swap, 2000, p.20)

Corporate storytelling seeks to create purposeful and goal-directed activity. Earlier in this paper we discussed the springboard story, a type of transformational story described by Steve Denning. Springboard stories are intended to generate imitative examples so that listeners can discover new knowledge and capabilities that they possess but do not use. The springboard story is what Denning successfully used at The World Bank to move that organization to a knowledge organization. These stories have proved a powerful method of communicating knowledge about norms and values. Stories are used because they are more memorable, and because they are more memorable they are more likely to be acted upon than other information that remains in the unconscious.

Snowden says that evolutionary failures often teach us as much if not more than successes. This is also generally true in organizations. He says negative story of someone else's failure spreads more quickly than one of success. This is because we, as humans, are highly attuned to failure as a survival characteristic. Snowden explains, "It is more important to avoid failure than to imitate success if we are to evolve." (Snowden, 1999, p.3)

Stories have the capacity to increase our descriptive capabilities, a strength in this age of uncertainty where we must be able to describe our environment and the self-awareness to describe our capabilities. Description capabilities are essential in strategic thinking and planning, and create a greater awareness of what we could achieve.

Fictional stories can be powerful because they provide a mechanism by which an organization can learn from failure without attributing blame. Some organizations actually create characters from archetypes extracted from a large number of organizational anecdotes. These characters are used over and over again. Once established, they become a natural vehicle for organizational learning and a repository for organizational memory.

Stories, when well constructed, can convey a high level of complex meaning. The use of sub-text can convey this meaning without making it

obvious. Sub-text is a term that refers to an unstated message not explicit in the dialogue of the story.

Finally, because stories communicate common values and rule systems, they provide a mechanism to build organic organizational response to emerging requirements. This means that as new situations and new challenges arise in response to an every-changing world, a common set of values will drive that response at every level of the organization. Snowden explains,

> "The higher the level of uncertainty at which we either have to operate, or more beneficially at which we choose to operate requires a concentration on common values and rule systems that allow the network of communities from which our organization is formed to self organize around a common purpose. In this world, old skills such as story and other models drawn from organic rather than mechanical thinking are survival skills, not nice to haves." (Snowden, 1999, p.7)

The Future of Storytelling

With the advent of the Intenet, a new style of digital storytelling is emerging. In this new medium, computer graphics and animation turn storytelling into a multimedia event, with dynamic sounds and pictures. What is new about storytelling via the web is the opportunity for story to reach untold numbers around the world. This form of storytelling "forces people to write down their life stories and tell them to strangers as well as friends," says Joan Wolff, a master storyteller. "It enhances human communication and enables us to reach out." (Wolff, 1999, p. 24-25)

Perhaps this is why an Internet search of storytelling sites yielded site after site, with storytelling societies and associations around the world. There is first and foremost http://www.storyteller.net launched in 1997 that includes photos and voice clips and interactive story-building pages. There is the Storytelling Home Page at http://member.aol.com/storypage/ and the Jonesborough Storytelling guild at http://www.preferred.com/storyteller and the Northern Appalachian Storytelling Festival page at http://www.mnsfld.edu/deps/storytel and the Timpanogog Storytelling Festival page at http://www.timpfest.org. Each of these sites lead onward to a plethora of storytelling connectivity. All this activity certainly purports that storytelling is alive and well.

In a newspaper article entitled "The Story of You" that appeared in the April 26, 2000 edition of *The Washington Post*, reporter Weeks cites Bernstein as saying "The future of literature lies on the screen" and Greco as saying "Books will become objects of nostalgia." (Weeks, 2000, p.C1) Weeks says storytelling is changing. More and more authors are writing for electronic reading screens, and as the medium changes from the oral tradition and paper to screen, the concept of story is changing. This paper began with a simple definition of story as that which has a beginning, middle and end. With the increased use of

hypertext on the Internet, even this simple definition is called into question. Modern day Internet storytellers are experimenting with moving images and music, and only the occasional sentence here or there. On the Journal E Web site, storyteller Dorow asks visitors to post their own stories or family photos, and invites readers/viewers to express their own innermost feelings, building those feelings right into the story being presented so others will respond to those and become part of the story, "changing and shaping and expanding and making more rich the story." (Weeks, 2000, p.C8-9) In short, the reader is becoming the storyteller, and the storyteller is becoming the reader.

New skill sets are required for this new Internet world of story. These skill sets require multiprocessing, the quick and sure assimilation of and response to fast-flowing ;images and sounds and sensory assaults.

Questions abound. How does the Internet change man's relationship to story? Does this new storytelling encourage or diminish creativity and growth? Will the importance of story acquiesce to images and sound? Whatever the answers, and whatever storytelling looks like in the future, of this I am sure. Through the creativity of story our sense of who we are and how we meet others in the world is evolving, for better or for worse. And the future of storytelling is the future of man.

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